Education: A Vessel for Ideological Indoctrination

"There is no such thing as a Palestinian people… It is not as if we came and threw them out and took their country. They did not exist."

-Golda Meir, 4th prime minister of Israel.

Such is the sentiment and attitude surrounding the Nakba (Palestinian for cataclysm, catastrophe); the event that saw the Zionist movement and ultimately Israel forcibly displacing over 750,000 Palestinians and destroying more than 400 villages. Though well documented by both Israeli and Palestinian sources, the story of the Nakba is frequently overlooked or ignored, not only in Israel but also in the United States and among American Jews, with the emphasis instead being placed on the establishment of Israel as a refuge for Jews. The expulsion of the Palestinian people that started before and with the founding of the State often goes unacknowledged. And with it, so do the foundations of unrest, in what was once known as the Palestinian region (Sadi, 2007).

Which raises the question; where does one trace back the systematic erasure of Palestinian history, and by extension, the truth behind the establishment of Israel? To what does one attribute the violence and territorial conflict endured by that segment of the Levant region, to this day?

A 2019 investigation by the Israeli NGO Akevot and the Israeli newspaper Haaretz revealed that important records documenting the Nakba were being suppressed by the Israeli government in archives. The suppressed "migration report," which documents Israel's depopulation of Palestinian communities in the first six months of the 1948 conflict, plainly refutes official Israeli state narratives about the course of events. Narratives which have been accepted widely as the undisputed truth, in the 75 years since the Nakba (Anziska, 2019).

As one researches this subject, one is compelled to ask themselves: how deeply has this systematic erasure of history entrenched Israel's society?

A glimpse into Israel's school curriculum provides insight into the same:

According to a 2020 study conducted at Tel Aviv University, Palestinians are rendered invisible to Israeli students by the absence of references to Palestine and the Palestinian people in Israeli textbooks. As a result, a large number of Israeli youth are not taught about the history of Palestine, and they are taught to see Palestinians as enemies rather than as neighbours (Gideon, 2021). In a roundtable discussion to compare and explain K–12 curricula in Israel, Palestine, and the United States, Israeli-American author and activist Miko Peled discovered that Israeli and Palestinian curricula are far from impartial when teaching about Palestine and Palestinians. This lack of objectivity breeds animosity between Israeli settlers and Palestinians and legitimises ethnic cleansing (nikki-admin, 2022).

In this discussion came to light the textbook maps from Israel that solely displayed Jewish communities, concealed Palestinian cities, and even employed iconography that stressed the Palestinian presence as a danger. It was found that altered maps are used to produce mental maps that have an impact on students' worldviews. These maps illustrate how the exclusion of the Palestinian people can lead to conflict and division.

Jewish historian Amnon Raz-Krokatzkin, in his book published in 2001, has stated that one of the more surprising aspects of the Israeli history curriculum on all grade levels is the indisputable absence of the history of the land. If, in some other contexts, molding a national consciousness was premised on the shared writing of the history of the homeland as a platform for defining the collective, here national consciousness was premised on the active erasure of the history of Palestine (Raz-krakotzkin, 2001). The Nakba is not covered in the Israeli citizenship curriculum, as stated explicitly in the official Ministry programme for citizenship. Only one or two quick history lessons regarding Israel's founding should be

taught in citizenship classes, and only to set the stage for the Declaration of Independence. Pinson (2020) conducted an analysis of the most recent version of the official citizenship textbook and came to the conclusion that it contains very little real-world information about Palestinian political identities or experiences (*The New Civics Curriculum for High Schools in Israel: The Discursive Construction of Palestinian Identity and Narratives - Halleli Pinson, 2020*, n.d.).

One would not be erroneous in assuming, given the sheer importance of all stages of education in shaping a child's view of the world, that its usage as a vessel to push disputable narratives is in fact a cause for concern. To counteract the historical tendency to romanticise Israel by avoiding criticism, a new approach to Israel education has emerged. Sociologists in Israel have proposed the introduction of "mature zionist ideology" in education. It assumes that involvement in Israel has much to offer a meaningful Jewish identity, but only when encountered critically and taking into account Israel's many complexities, both historic and contemporary (Alexander, 2015).

This marks a small but crucial step to dissociating education from ideological indoctrination, a challenge that needs to be faced head on by the world today.

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